

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
USMISSION GENEVA
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SECSTATE WASHDC 3275
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 11298

FOLLOWING TEL SENT BANGKOK FROM CHIANG MAI 14 APR 78 REPEATED
FYI:

QTE
C O N F I D E N T I A L CHIANG MAI 139

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, TH, LA
SUBJECT: RTG REFUGEE POLICY

REF: BANGKOK 10537, CHIANG MAI 115

SUMMARY: RTG OFFICIAL IN CHIANG RAI AND CHIANG KHONG HAVE CONFIRMED THAT THEY ARE FORCIBLY REPATRIATING HILLTRIBE REFUGEES BACK INTO LAOS. REPATRIATION IS PRECEDED BY CONTACTS WITH LAO OFFICIALS WHO PROMISE NOT TO KILL REPATRIATED REFUGEES ON ARRIVAL. AS THE GOVERNOR IS CONVINCED HE IS ACTING UNDER ORDERS WITH WHICH HE AGREES, THE ONLY WAY HE IS GOING TO STOP SENDING REFUGEES BACK IS ON RECEIPT OF CLEAR, DIRECT ORDERS FROM BANGKOK. END SUMMARY.

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1. CONSOFF CALLED ON CHAING RAI GOVERNOR CHOOM BUNRUANG APRIL 12 AND EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER FORCED REPATRIATION OF LAO REFUGEES. GOVERNOR CHOOM CONFIRMED THAT 54 YAO REFUGEES HAD BEEN REPATRIATED ON MARCH 27 AFTER CONTACTS WITH LAO OFFICIALS ASSURED HIM THE REFUGEES' LIVES WOULD NOT BE ENDANGERED. THE GOVERNOR SAID HE WAS ACTING ON STRICT ORDERS FROM MINISTRY

OF INTERIOR THAT NO NEW REFUGEES WERE TO BE ACCEPTED AFTER NOV 15, 1977, AND THAT ANYONE WHO TRIED TO ENTER THAILAND WAS TO BE FORCED BACK.

2. CONSOFF VISITED CHIANG KHONG DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS SAME DAY AND SPOKE WITH DEPUTY DISTRICT OFFICER FOR SECURITY. HE STATED THAT WHEN NEW REFUGEES ARE APPREHENDED, THEY ARE FIRST BROUGHT TO DISTRICT OFFICE. APPARENTLY DECISION IS MADE AT THAT POINT AS TO WHETHER REFUGEE FITS INTO "ECONOMIC" OR "POLITICAL" CATEGORY. "ECONOMIC" REFUGEES ARE REPATRIATED, WITH EXCEPTION OF THOSE WHO HAVE RELATIVES IN THE CHIANG KHONG CAMP, WHO ARE ALLOWED ENTRY INTO THE CAMP. THE DEPUTY STATED THAT "POLITICAL" REFUGEES WERE TO BE SENT TO THE THAI DETENTION CENTER AT MAE CHAN, ALTHOUGH IN FACT, NO SUCH REFUGEES HAD BEEN YET SENT THERE FROM CHIANG KHONG.

3. WE SAW 34 RECENTLY ARRIVED REFUGEES AT THE CHIANG KHONG DISTRICT OFFICE. THEY WERE LAO, CHINESE HAW, MEO AND THAI LEU. AN ADDITIONAL 14 REFUGEES HAD MADE THEIR ESCAPE FROM THE DISTRICT OFFICE THAT MORING. DISTRICT OFFICIALS COMPLAINED THAT THERE WAS NO BUDGET FOR FOOD OR OTHER SUPPLIES FOR THESE REFUGEES, AND SOME OF THEM WERE PROVIDING FOOD OUT OF THEIR PERSONAL RESOURCES. THOUGH THESE OFFICIALS WERE CLEARLY TROUBLED BY THE ANTI-HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS OF FORCED REPATRIATION, THEY CONFIDENTIAL

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STRESSED THEY WERE ACTING ON STRICT ORDERS FROM ABOVE.

4. COMMENT: CURRENT MINISTRY OF INTERIOR ORDERS ON REFUGEES ARE OBVIOUSLY OPEN TO DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS AS IS DEMONSTRATED IN NAM WHERE THE GOVERNOR HAS CHOSEN TO INTERPRET CURRENT RTG POLICY TO MEAN THAT HE DOES NOT HAVE TO REPATRIATE ANY REFUGEES. EVEN SO, CHIANG RAI GOVERNOR CHOOM APPEARS TO BE CONVINCED HE IS FOLLOWING ORDERS FROM ABOVE IN CONTINUING TO REPATRIATE REFUGEES. BASED ON THIS AND PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS WE MUST CONCLUDE THAT GOVERNOR CHOOM PERSONALLY BELIEVES WHAT HE IS DOING IS THE BEST POLICY FOR THAILAND'S OWN INTEREST. ALSO, HIS THINKING MAY HAVE BEEN REINFORCED BY THE RECENT ORDERS DIRECTING THAT HE ENSURE THAT THE ARMED BURMESE DISSIDENTS ARE EXPELLED BACK INTO BURMA. HOWEVER, WHATEVER HIS JUSTIFICATIONS, IT IS VERY CLEAR THAT THE ONLY WAY HE IS GOING TO STOP SENDING REFUGEES BACK ACROSS THE RIVER IS ON THE BASIS OF CLEAR, UNEQUIVOCAL ORDERS FROM HIS SUPERIORS IN BANGKOK. TANNER UNQTE WHITEHOUSE

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